



# EMERGING ARTIST GRANT

BY ANGUS MacLACHLAN



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EMERGING ARTIST GRANT  
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*To Beth. My Grate Friend.*

## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

EMERGING ARTIST GRANT is set in various, fairly empty spaces in Winston-Salem, North Carolina — A mid-sized American city that claims to have the oldest Arts Council in the nation, and calls itself “The City of Arts and Innovation.” And used to make lots of cigarettes.

The play was written for the Chamber Auditorium at Reynolda House Museum of American Art. It had a blonde-wood stage raised two feet above the floor, two small closets where entrances and exits were made on stage right and left, and three large sound baffles and two windows on the back wall. With a high stool and a couple of chairs, and lighting, it suggested all the locations. If they are not immediately identifiable — “Where are we?, What’s going on?, What did he mean?” — so much the better.

## **CHARACTERS**

ETHAN — 28, a filmmaker, with almost no regional dialect, who is going through his Saturn Return.

SPENCER — 26, infectiously enthusiastic.

LIZ — 35, Ethan's sister. A hairdresser.

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## Scene 1

*The new seventy-five-seat Chamber Auditorium at Reynolda House Museum of American Art. Ethan sits on the lip of the stage, texting. He laughs at some response he gets. At times he makes notes on a clipboard.*

*Spencer comes breezing in, smiling, keyed up. She sails up to Ethan, who smiles at her good looks. He studies her intensely throughout. It could be a blind date.*

ETHAN. Hi. Hi. Spencer?

SPENCER. *(A bit breathlessly nervous.)* Yeah. Ethan? It's so nice to meet you.

ETHAN. Yeah. Yeah. You, too.

SPENCER. Yeah. You, too.

ETHAN. Right. Okay. You want to sit down?

SPENCER. Sure. Here?

ETHAN. Or — Anywhere —

SPENCER. No, here, okay. Sorry. Yeah.

ETHAN. *(Zeroing in.)* You're really pretty.

SPENCER. — Is that bad?

ETHAN. No.

SPENCER. Okay. Then — thanks.

ETHAN. Beautiful eyes.

SPENCER. I didn't know if that's what you wanted.

ETHAN. Don't worry about it.

SPENCER. Or — what *do* you want?

ETHAN. Forget about it. I just thought we'd sit —  
SPENCER. Right.  
ETHAN. Just, you know, get to know each other a little bit.  
SPENCER. Great! Okay. (*Laughs, nervous.*) This is funny. To me.  
ETHAN. What is?  
SPENCER. I didn't know — sure. What? Should I start?  
ETHAN. What?  
SPENCER. Oh. Okay. You start — I mean —  
ETHAN. It's okay. Don't — you don't have to do anything.  
SPENCER. Okay, cool. I know. I'm — it's. Stupid. Is my hair too short?  
ETHAN. No. — Can you grow it?  
SPENCER. Yeah.  
ETHAN. Then that gives me choices.  
SPENCER. Right. (*Looks dubious.*) Uhhh ...  
ETHAN. What?  
SPENCER. I look a little dorky longer, but — Maybe you want that.  
ETHAN. I don't know yet. I don't have any ... specific —  
SPENCER. No, it's okay — I wasn't planning on cutting it.  
ETHAN. Good.  
SPENCER. This week.  
ETHAN. You cut it yourself?  
SPENCER. Yeah. Can you tell?  
ETHAN. No. It's great. It looks great. I cut mine.  
SPENCER. Oh yeah — I thought so.  
ETHAN. What — it looks like I cut it myself?  
SPENCER. No!  
ETHAN. You said you thought —  
SPENCER. It's good. It's fine. It looks good. I don't like hairdressers, do you?  
ETHAN. Really?  
SPENCER. They're usually so bossy and dictatorial.  
ETHAN. (*Laughs a little.*) That's funny.  
SPENCER. Why?  
ETHAN. No — uh — Thanks for coming today.  
SPENCER. Sure! I was excited you called me back.  
ETHAN. You saw the flyer? You know what we're doing?  
SPENCER. Or — whoever did call.  
ETHAN. That was me.  
SPENCER. Oh — I didn't know if it was your — staff — or — assistant, or —

ETHAN. Yeah, right. No — I don't have anyone else. Yet.

SPENCER. It was a message so I couldn't really tell it was you — you know — I didn't know your voice. Then.

ETHAN. I'm it.

SPENCER. Really? You do it all by yourself?

ETHAN. What do *you* do?

SPENCER. What — like my job? Or my acting?

ETHAN. No. No. No acting. Forget about acting, I hate acting. In your life.

SPENCER. My hobbies?

ETHAN. Whatever. You want to tell me.

SPENCER. I'm a teacher.

ETHAN. Oh. Cool.

SPENCER. At Wake Forest.

ETHAN. Really? What do you teach?

SPENCER. Acting.

ETHAN. (*Laughs, a little, nervously.*) Oh. Okay.

SPENCER. (*Registers his reaction.*) ... I — I just moved to Winston-Salem.

ETHAN. From where?

SPENCER. Pittsburgh.

ETHAN. That's a big change, I bet.

SPENCER. Tell me about it.

ETHAN. You don't like it here?

SPENCER. No! I just moved. I'm a new adjunct theatre professor.

ETHAN. — So you won't be here long?

SPENCER. Long enough. One-year contract. No — I like Winston-Salem. What I've seen. It's so — there's so many trees. This museum here — Reynolda House — it looks nice. I haven't gone through it yet.

ETHAN. Yeah, it's nice. They let me have the auditorium for today.

SPENCER. So there's lots of support for the arts here?

ETHAN. (*Not really.*) I guess. Sort of.

SPENCER. Do you ever feel funny 'cause everything's named after tobacco? (*Ethan is a bit taken aback. Just a jot.*)

ETHAN. Uh —

SPENCER. I'm sorry. But — Isn't Reynolda House — like Reynolds Tobacco Company?

ETHAN. Yeah — this was their family home. This wing is new, but —



SPENCER. Well — we have, you know, Carnegie Mellon —  
 ... Robber barons ...

ETHAN. Right. In Pittsburgh.

SPENCER. "Every fortune starts with a crime." (*Another slight smack.*)

ETHAN. — What?

SPENCER. There's always some rape somewhere. Elgin Marbles.  
 Medicis. It's the history of Art.

ETHAN. Oh — right. Interesting.

SPENCER. Yeah. — No, I like it here. I'm looking forward to  
 exploring. And starting classes.

ETHAN. You haven't started yet?

SPENCER. No — next week.

ETHAN. How heavy is your load — ?

SPENCER. Oh — no, don't worry — it's just three hours a week.  
 This term. That's no problem — is that what you wanted to — ?

ETHAN. (*Shifts closer.*) Do you have a boyfriend? Are you seeing  
 anyone?

SPENCER. (*Taken aback. Some.*) Uh —

ETHAN. Sorry. — I'm sorry.

SPENCER. That's okay.

ETHAN. (*Laughs.*) I like your reaction, though. That was good.

SPENCER. Okay. Good. Good reaction ... — Do you? (*Smack.*)

ETHAN. What?

SPENCER. Have a boyfriend? (*Ethan reacts. Laughs a jot.*) I'm kid-  
 ding. You look completely straight. — Good reaction, though.  
 Does the character have a boyfriend?

ETHAN. (*Regroups.*) Uh — I don't know. Now, I am gonna be  
 seeing other people — I see other people. Just so you know.

SPENCER. (*Unsure.*) ... I wasn't asking for myself ...

ETHAN. — Today. Hopefully. But, you might be good. For something.

SPENCER. Really?

ETHAN. I'd like to use you. I like your face.

SPENCER. (*Excited.*) Good. Thanks. Do you want me to read, or —

ETHAN. Not yet. Not yet.

SPENCER. Okay. Oh — Congratulations on *Mr. Tuttle*. That's  
 fantastic —

ETHAN. (*Perking up.*) Oh — have you seen it?

SPENCER. No.

ETHAN. Oh.

SPENCER. Did it even play Pittsburgh?

ETHAN. (*Doubtful.*) Pittsburgh? Yeah. The theatrical release wasn't real wide.

SPENCER. I heard it was good. Really good. It got great reviews, didn't it? I mean — like — amazing. And went to all those film festivals ... Wasn't it at "Can" — ? Or "Cahn," however you say it?

ETHAN. Well, Directors' Fortnight. Yeah. You should see it.

SPENCER. Is it on Netflix?

ETHAN. (*Doubtful.*) We're working on that ... I think. And I've got another one called *Today @ 4* that we've submitted to —

SPENCER. Is it about Winston-Salem, too? God, it's so cool you're here.

ETHAN. Yeah, well.

SPENCER. I mean, really — I was, like, thrilled to see your thing at school. 'Cause I'd read all about you — before I came, even, um, I knew, um, and then it was like the third day I was here and I saw it, and, I thought — this could be a cool place to be. You know? I mean, I know there's, like, the film school here at, uh —

ETHAN. North Carolina School of the Arts.

SPENCER. Yeah — did you go there?

ETHAN. No. I didn't go to film school.

SPENCER. Oh. Okay.

ETHAN. Can I get your contact info?

SPENCER. Yeah! And I have a picture and resumé.

ETHAN. Okay. But this — I have to tell you — the way I work isn't like — Or — it's really natural and organic, and collaborative, and — real. I guess. Have you done any films before?

SPENCER. Not yet. But I had a sort of an improv group in Pittsburgh that — and street theatre — so I've done a lot of — collaborative ...

ETHAN. Like — street — you mean, like mime — ?

SPENCER. No. No. Well — some — we did, you know, everything. It was fun. It was cool. No, it really was cool. (*He laughs, enjoying her loose, playful enthusiasm.*)

ETHAN. You could be good. No. You could be good. You give me a little ... thrill. (*Spencer is a bit thrilled, and not quite sure how he means it.*)

SPENCER. — Thanks.

ETHAN. I'm just making a note to myself ... (*He writes an idea on his clipboard, and info from her resumé.*)

SPENCER. For the character? Uh. What's your story about? Can I ask? Do you know? Have you got, uh, your financing?

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by Angus MacLachlan

1M, 2W

Ethan, a successful independent filmmaker, is sweating over casting his newest project in his hometown of Winston-Salem when Spencer, a newly-minted adjunct theatre professor, auditions for the lead. Their mutual attraction is immediate, and they start a charming and amusing dance of personal and professional eroticism. Ethan's smart and witty older sister, Liz, is thrown into the mix. She supports herself as a hairdresser; her acting career, and her hopes, have derailed a bit with time. A subtly comedic story set in the creative world, EMERGING ARTIST GRANT explores how we struggle to make something of our lives, and it questions the moral crises we encounter when trying for our dreams.

*"Clearly, this tale of an independent filmmaker's intuitive (and, at times, seemingly quixotic) attempts to initiate a new project has the ring of authenticity to it. ... [A] witty play [and] something of a master class in artistic self-appraisal and survival for those involved in theater and film. ... the questions of how many interpersonal boundaries are transgressed ... remain up in the air until the end."*

—IndyWeek.com

Also by Angus MacLachlan  
THE DEAD EYE BOY  
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